DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 276 TM 033 079

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TITLE Taking Tests: More Time for the Handicapped?
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Accommodations (Disabilities); *Disabilities; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Standardized Tests; *Testing Problems; *Timed Tests

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses issues related to testing accommodations for the disabled, focusing on the provision of extra time in testing. Recent research on learning styles and multiple intelligences makes the case for allowing for student individuality in instruction, but considering these theories in designing test accommodations could lead to endless changes. Among the questions that must be considered when state mandated tests are given is whether the student would be hindered in indicating what had been learned if no accommodations were made. It is also important to determine whether accommodations are to be considered on a case-by-case basis and who will decide the accommodations to be made. Other considerations are the threat of litigation if accommodations are not made and general issues of fairness. A complete review of standardized testing practices should be conducted to determine the proper place of testing and the proper use of tests before appropriate accommodations can be designed. (SLD)

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Taking Tests: More Time for the Handicapped?

Marlow Ediger

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TAKING TESTS: MORE TIME FOR THE HANDICAPPED?

In Kirksville, Missouri, my home town, there is a slogan painted over with white paint but still visible on a former clothing store, which reads, "We treat you right and all alike".

In giving standardized tests, should all test takers be given the same treatment such as directions provided for test taking as well as the same amount of time, among other variables, in their completion? Olson (2001) wrote the following pertaining to extra time formerly given to disabled students:

In a ground breaking decision, the Educational Testing Service announced last week that students with disabilities who receive extra time to take its graduate admissions tests will no longer have such accommodations noted on the scores sent to colleges and universities.

The policy , which is to go into effect in October, covers such tests as the Graduate Record Examinations and PRAXIS, a widely used series of tests for prospective teachers. But it eventually could have broader implications for precollegiate education by affecting such assessments as the SAT, the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test and the Advance Placement exams, which are administered by the ETS but are owned by the New York City based College Board.

There are educators who recommend that all students, regardless of ability, receive the same instruction as the others in the classroom. With the same instruction is included the same subject matter. The reasoning here is that those who receive "watered down" or simplified content lose out in school and in society. These students then do not receive the sophisticated subject matter that the other students in the classroom receive and will then achieve less well in society due to not having the complicated content needed to do well in the societal arena. Educators taking this point of view believe that equality is involved when all students are taught the same content, concepts, and generalizations at the same time in the curriculum (See Ediger, 2000, Chapter Eleven). The question involved pertains to, "What is equality in the curriculum?

Making Accommodations for the Disabled

Should there be complete standardization in the administering of tests to public school students? (Fine, February 14, 2001) wrote:

The settlement of a landmark class action in Oregon will allow students with learning disabilities to use electronic spell check, dictation machines, and other forms of assistance deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis to take statewide tests. The settlement, reached February 1, stems from a 1999 lawsuit filed against the state board of education by

a group of parents who claimed that the standardized test violated the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

When designing the assessment system, first used in the 1998 - 1999 school year, the board did not take into account the needs of Oregon students with dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, and other learning disabilities, according to the suit.

In the lawsuit, the parents of five children claimed that it was unfair that their children had been accommodated in classroom work, but then were not allowed these same forms of assistance on the Certificate of Initial Mastery Tests, which are given in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Students who failed the tests can be held back and forced to go to summer school... 95% of students with disabilities failed the test given in 1999, as did 70% of non-disabled students... students with disabilities had already been receiving some accommodations on tests, including the use of calculators. Some dyslexic students were granted extra time while some students with attention deficit disorder took a test broken into shorter sessions.

Standardized tests have always emphasized fairness in that uniform standards were used for all taking the test such as

1. the same directions for test taking given to all participants.
2. the same time limits for all taking the test.
3. the same norms used for all having completed the test, such as a student then showing a certain percentile to indicate achievement.

Items in test taking which cannot be controlled in many situations include the following:

1. proper temperature readings for those taking the test.
2. comfortable seating arrangements.
3. a suitable noise level. The writer took a standardized test on the university level in which the students were seated very close together for mass testing with no elbow room in between. A student seated across from the writer chewed gum so loudly that he was forced to concentrate on the nose made therefrom. When mass numbers are tested, the humanness of the situation decreases.

With multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1993), test taking favors those with verbal intelligence, such as in reading multiple choice items in the test and making the needed responses on the answer sheet. Additional intelligences which have implications for test taking accommodations, with a brief comment on their meanings given by the author, are the following:

1. visual/spatial. Test takers here with accommodations would be able to show learnings acquired through art products.
2. logical/mathematics. Here, learners would indicate what has

been achieved through reasoning logically; essay tests might then given which are non-machine scorable.

3. musical/rhythmical. Test takers would be accommodated in showing learnings with putting lyrics to musical notation. Many facts, concepts, and generalizations may be shown in musical form.

4. intrapersonal intelligence. The student then reveals content learned on an individual basis. Why? The student does best in school work with personal endeavors, not within a group setting.

5. interpersonal intelligence. Students in this category work best and achieve more optimally within a committee setting. In this case, learners would then pool efforts in test taking whereby each contributes as optimally as possible. This is unheard of today.

6. bodily/kinesthetic. Physical endeavors and tasks are given to these learners to show content achieved. Manual dexterity is used in many of these tasks and in work performed in society. In the societal arena, many workers engage in vital manual tasks such as carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, and carpet layers, among others.

7. scientific. Objective thinking is vital in this category of indicating learnings achieved. Knowledge of science too is important. Objective thinking is contrasted with subjective knowledge which existentialists believe is true of all/most knowledge.

Learning styles theory (Searson and Dunn, 2001) has further complexities to add to the test taking dimension for students to reveal what has been learned. Vital ingredients here include the following:

1. acceptable noise levels, temperature readings, and informal versus formal seating arrangements.

2. emotional elements such as conformity versus nonconformity, as well as preferences for structure versus choices in terms of what to learn.

3. sociological factors such as studying alone or with others as well as preferring collegial versus a more authoritarian teacher.

4. physiological elements such as using auditory, tactual, and/or kinesthetic ways of learning. Included too are moving around or sitting still as well as eating versus not eating while concentrating on the task involved.

5. psychological factors such as analytic learners who focus on facts in a step by step fashion which lead to an understanding, as compared to global learners who desire to understand how what is learned relates to themselves before focusing on to facts. Analytic students respond best to printed words whereas global leaners respond better to illustrations and pictures.

There certainly is much input which Learning Styles Theory implies to incorporate into the testing and measurement movement. For example number one above pertaining to formal versus non-formal methods of

seating students, state mandated testing does emphasize a formal method in which learners are seated in rows and columns instead of input from the test taker as to where and how to be seated.

Multiple Intelligences Theory as well as Learning Styles Theory do have a plethora of ideas on maximizing student testing opportunities. The accommodations to be made in testing situations could be endless!

Standardized Objectives in the Curriculum

States do mandate high standards for students to achieve. These are the same for all students within a state. The standards become objectives for teachers to use in teaching and learning situations. It is up to the teacher to use these objectives in designing an appropriate curriculum. Students then may be taught with chosen learning opportunities which should assist each student to achieve the state mandated objectives. With mainstreamed and full inclusion students, as well as slow, average, and fast achievers, decisions need to be made pertaining to providing for individual differences in the instructional arena. The mandated test might well be standardized for all with the same test items, directions, time limits, and scoring key used in machine scoring. The question arises, "What kind of accommodations should be made for handicapped students, in particular? The writer gave an oral test to four students when teaching for over thirty years on the university level. If accommodations had not been made in these four cases, each student would have received, of course, an F grade. Or, should the instructor have standardized testing procedures for each and every student in class? No exceptions would then be made for any student.

For whom should accommodations be made when state mandated tests are given? One can only provide guidelines here with few, if any, absolute standards. The following questions should be thoroughly considered:

1. would the student be hindered in indicating what has been learned if no accommodations are made?
2. should accommodations be considered on a case by case basis, only?
3. who decides which accommodations should be made and for whom?
4. what is the role of class action threats of litigation pertaining to parents advocating selected accommodations be made for their offspring?
5. why are accommodations for state mandated testing more difficult to obtain as compared to IEPs for handicapped students in the classroom?

6. should cost factors enter in when decisions are made pertaining to making accommodations in state mandated testing?

7. should state mandated tests ideally be written on several levels of student achievement in order to provide for individual differences?

8. do standardized procedures in testing violate the concept of providing for individual differences among students?

9. do other students perceive testing situations as being unfair when accommodations are made for selected learners?

10. what would truly make for a fair testing situation (See Ediger, 2000, Chapter Sixteen)?

Protests over state mandated testing is becoming more widespread. Manzo (Education Week, May 16, 2001) wrote the following:

Test weary protesters in nearly a dozen states hoisted placards outside state capitols and hosted debates in high school auditoriums last week as they kicked off what organizers touted as "a month of resistance."

In what is becoming a springtime ritual during prime testing season, parents, teachers, and students have been voicing their objections to states' growing reliance on tests to gauge student achievement and the impending high stakes that could make it harder for many students to receive diplomas.

Most of the demonstrations drew relatively small crowds -- 70 protesters in Detroit, 100 in Northampton, Massachusetts, 300 in Los Angeles -- but the largest, at the state capitol in Albany, New York, saw more than 1500 marchers against the regents' exams.

Advocates of state testing as a means of holding teachers, schools, and students accountable for higher academic standards characterize the opposition as a small but vocal minority. But testing foes express optimism that their efforts are gaining ground and attracting more attention from legislators and parents... "opposition to the overuse and misuse of tests is growing," ...

Closing

Perhaps, a total review of state mandated testing purposes needs to be in the offing. The following statements then need to be analyzed and modifications made:

1. all students should take the same state mandated test in a standardized way.

2. one test alone should determine if a student is doing well in school and also if he/she is to receive a high school diploma.

3. state mandated tests are carefully designed and pilot tested to take out weaknesses.

4. these tests are valid in that they truly cover what is essential for students to know and do.

5. they are reliable in that consistency in results is shown through test/retest, alternative forms, or split half reliability.

6. no accommodations in test taking should be made when all students take the tests. It is not fair to make accommodations.

7. students need to pass a state mandated test each year in order to be promoted to the next grade level.

8. high stakes testing is necessary in order that students do the best possible in school.

9. testing is the only way to ascertain student achievement since no other satisfactory alternatives are available.

10. a single numeral, such as a percentile, "tells it all" about student success or failure in school (See Ediger, 1995, 246-251).

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